

# Towing Speeds

IN MICHIGAN



**THIS PRESENTATION  
CREATED BY:**

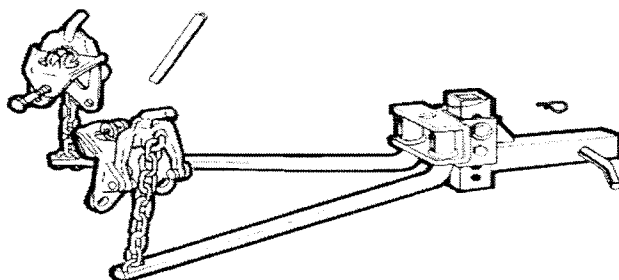


***MICHIGAN STATE POLICE,  
TRAFFIC SERVICES SECTION,  
VEHICLE CODE UNIT***

The maximum speed limit for a passenger vehicle towing a trailer is clearly limited to 55 mph unless one of the following conditions is met:

- 1) The trailer and load do not exceed 750 lbs.
- 2) The trailer is a “trailer coach” that:
  - ☞ is not more than 26 ft in length
  - ☞ has brakes on each wheel
  - ☞ is attached to the vehicle by an equalizing or stabilizing coupling unit.

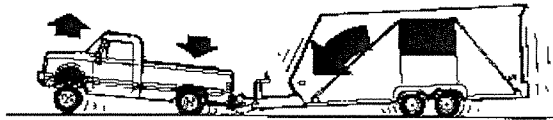
An “equalizing or stabilizing coupling unit” is a type of hitch generally composed of a standard type ball hitch with two additional horizontal bars that connect the towing vehicle to the trailer tongue.



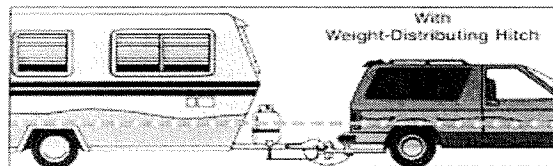
These bars are placed in tension such that they transfer the tongue weight of the trailer evenly throughout the towing vehicle.

**In this way, the towing vehicle is kept relatively flat relative to the road surface.**

- **Without Load Equalizing Hitch:**



- **With Load Equalizing Hitch:**



**So, exactly what is . . .**

- **A passenger vehicle?**
- **A pickup truck?**
- **A trailer coach?**



## Neither “passenger vehicle” nor “pickup truck” are defined in the Michigan Vehicle Code, however,



- “Truck” is clearly defined by 257.75 as “ . . . every motor vehicle designed . . . primarily for the transportation of property.”
- Pickup trucks are generally registered as a “commercial vehicle,” which is defined in 257.7 as “ . . . constructed or used for transportation of goods, wares or merchandise . . .”

## Further...



- To assist in the interpretation of the relevant sections of the vehicle code, it is necessary to contrast the definition of “truck” with the plain meaning of the term “passenger vehicle.”
- The term “passenger vehicle” indicates a vehicle which is primarily intended to transport passengers.
- It is clear that if a vehicle is primarily intended to transport goods or property, it cannot also be primarily intended to transport passengers.

## **A vehicle cannot be both a “truck” and a “passenger vehicle” simultaneously**

- Similar to a “dump truck,” a pickup truck is equipped with an area specifically designed for the transportation of property. In either truck, this area is not conducive to transporting passengers



## **Determining Factor**

- Primary design/construction is the determining factor for “passenger vehicle” vs. “truck.”
- Using the cargo area of a pickup truck (or a truck) for the transportation of passengers does not change its intended function: to transport cargo or property, not persons.



***\*It is the position of Traffic Services that a pickup truck is a type of truck, and by definition cannot also be a passenger vehicle***

**A vehicle cannot be both a “truck” and a “passenger vehicle” simultaneously.**

- SUV's are designed primarily to transport passengers and their belongings.
- Despite the fact that some are built on truck frames, no part of an SUV is designed or intended primarily for transporting property as is a truck.
- Therefore, drivers of SUV's must comply with laws pertaining to passenger vehicles.



**If a pickup truck is not a passenger vehicle, the speed limitation of 55 mph in 257.627(5) for a passenger vehicle towing a trailer *does not* apply to a pickup truck towing a trailer.**



**Additional evidence that the legislature did not intend to limit a pickup truck towing a trailer to 55 miles per hour is found in 257.721(6):**

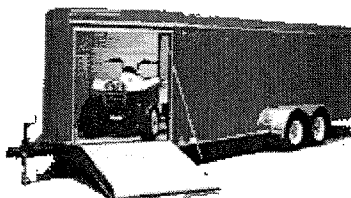
- This section mandates that a pickup truck towing a fifth wheel semi-trailer designed for recreational living purposes, and an additional trailer “be considered a passenger vehicle and shall comply with the speed limit requirements of section 627(5).”
- If the legislature had intended that pickup trucks be considered “passenger vehicles,” this subsection would be an unnecessary redundancy.



Note also that the exemption from the 55 mph speed limit for a passenger vehicle drawing a “trailer coach” is very specific and limited:



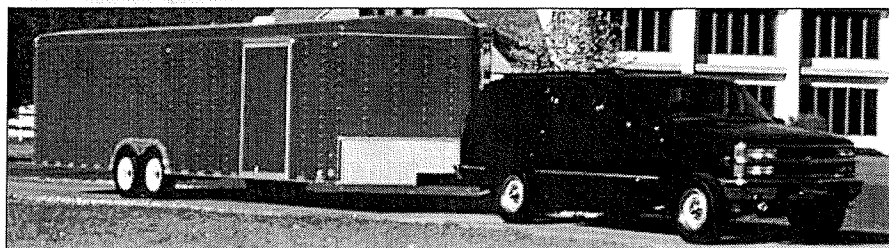
MCL 257.74 narrowly defines a “trailer coach” as “... every vehicle primarily designed and used as temporary living quarters for recreational, camping, or travel purposes and drawn by another vehicle.”



As a result, trailers that do not fit the definition of “trailer coach” and weigh more than 750 pounds, such as: anything larger than a single snowmobile or motorcycle trailer, or small utility trailer, etc., cannot legally be towed at speeds above 55 mph by a passenger vehicle even if the trailer has brakes and an equalizing hitch.

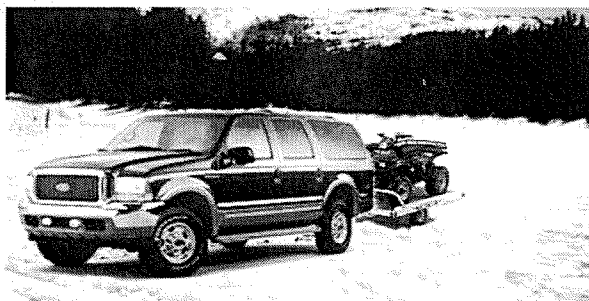
## TOWING SPEEDS

Description	Car or SUV	Pickup truck or truck
No trailer	70 mph	70 mph
Trailer <= than 750 pounds	70 mph	70 mph
Trailer coach with brakes	70 mph	70 mph
Trailer coach without brakes > 750 lbs	55 mph	70 mph
All other trailers > 750 pounds	55 mph	70 mph
Fifth wheel	n/a	70 mph
Fifth wheel with additional trailer	n/a	55 mph



Assuming the gross weight of the trailer and ATV's exceeds 750 lbs, the speed limit for this vehicle combination in a 70 mph zone is:

# 55 mph!





**Speed limit for this vehicle  
combination in a 70 mph zone:**

**70 mph!**

